COMMUNION MEDITATION
Galatians 3:25-28
Psalm 133
World Communion - October 2, 1983

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Someone once asked the famous Russina ballerina, Pavlova, what she was trying to say in a particular number. Her response was: "If I could have said it, I wouldn't have had to dance." How appropriate today to have experienced uniquely a magnificent Biblical poem which touches on themes which somehow suffer trivialization whenever we try to talk too much about them: unity, peace, reconciliation.

> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!
> It is like the precious oil upon head, running down upon the beard of Aaron,
> running down on the collar of his robes!
> It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!
> For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore. **Psalm 133**

I love those images: ...An elderly grandfather (Aaron) in the mold of the prototypical priest, with his flowing beard, the symbol of his dignity and wisdom and many years: cut according to the specific requirements of Levitical law, extending down over the collar of his robe.

...A patriarch...A matriarch...Progenitors, co-creators, birthers, of sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, great-grandsons, great-granddaughters. "How good and pleasant it is to dwell in unity."

I love the image because it evokes other images...of hot August Sunday afternoon family reunions, unwelcome interruptions to more mundane pursuits of baseball and swimming...of an old man, the patriarch, surveying it all, sitting in a lawn chair in the only available shade, looking at what he had wrought and thinking, perhaps, "How good and pleasant it is."

Or of homecomings, of rare but marvelous reunions when brothers and sisters sit at table, having come literally from east and west, north and south...of moments of grace, when, out of the complex dynamics of the past, out of a shared history of victory, defeat, joy, sadness, love, and anger, there comes a clue, a hint, a whisper that, finally, one's sons and daughters care for one another, and enjoy one another. How good and pleasant that is!

How good? It is like oil, precious, life sustainer: along with grain and wine - all a people needed to survive; oil from olives - grown in Tekoa, Amos' vineyard; ground, refined, filtered, salted; oil for cooking the cakes, for anointing the kings and the priests in their ordination; oil for the lamps and oil to soften and heal the cuts and bruises and scratches. Oil beautifully scented, precious, to make the face shine, to enhance one's beauty for one's beloved; the symbol of all that was good and whole and fragrant about God's creation. When brothers and sisters dwell in unity, it's like that oil, baptizing the head of that dear old man and running down over that beautifully lined face, over that beard onto his robes...abundant, delicious, goodness.

How pleasant? Like the dew of Hermon; majestic, snowcapped mountain, north of the border, in Lebanon, where dew is so abundant it is like rain: mysterious, invigorating, refreshing ancient symbol of resurrection and hope and immortality. It is like the hills of Israel, parched, dry-benefitting from the abundance of dew from Mt. Hermon in Lebanon.

good Hebrew and Greek words that describe a wide range of divine attributes. The result was a very narrow, impoverished concept of God as male. The church is learning better now and is beginning to re-discover the full Biblical appreciation of God. We are still tied to scholarly references and Bible translations from the past. But they can express the truth of the Doctrine of the Trinity even when nouns and pronouns are wrong, as you will hear in some quotations.

He who has seen me has seen God, Jesus told his diciples. And we confess that is true, for as we learn of Christ we think of God in terms of the teaching, the life, and the sacrifice of Jesus. Then, continuing his teaching to the disciples, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...: you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." And these words set forth perhaps the first expression of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

One of the earliest church leaders described the doctrine this way: "belief in one God, existent in and manifest under three modes or aspects of being" and these three aspects were purely temporary. Well, that certainly clears it all up. If that sentence is as hard for you to swallow as for me, maybe we'll find the nineteenth-century Englishman James Martineau more helpful. This is his definition: "The Father is God in himself; the Son is God manifested in the universe and in history, and brought to focus in the frame of redemption; while the Holy Spirit is God in communion with man's inner spirit."

Regardless who is describing the Doctrine of the Trinity, the beginning point must be with God the Creator. The important statement here comes first out of the experience of ancient Israel: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is one." That is, we cannot divide our allegiance between two or more little gods or idols. We cannot worship at the altar of security or success or pride and still serve God. God is one and demands our full loyalty.

This belief in one God is known as ethical monotheism. It was developed through the history of the Old Testament people. The utterances of the prophets, the leading through the wilderness from Egypt to the promised land, the survival and growth of the tiny unprotected nation Israel, the punishment of the nation in the time of exile — all these were understood by the Israelites as showing the power of the one God. Knowing that God is one is essential and true, but the centuries of Israel's swinging back and forth between faithfulness and unfaithfulness demonstrated that humanity needed a fuller knowledge of God. So, for the Christian, two new facts of history and experience have changed our thought of the one eternal God.

The first of these new facts is Jesus of Nazareth. He brought God near in a new, intimate way. Firm believers in the unity of God found themselves thinking of Jesus whenever they thought of God. They knew that God was like Christ and that God was in Christ. Yet Jesus was not God, for he suffered pain and death. He was truly human. He was the incarnation of God. So they came to speak of the Father and the Son; and even if they couldn't quite explain it or think it out, it was at the very heart of their faith.

of all things is what the Bible is about: a harmony in nature, in humanity, between people, and within the individual...a wholeness, a shalom. The Bible is about the ways human beings break apart what God has made whole - and how God is working with his people to put it back together, to heal.

How good and pleasant it is, not only when one family dwells in unity - but when we sense that this unity, this wholeness of the whole creation, this peace is what God is about..."In Christ you are all one," St. Paul told a gang of contentious, quarreling, Christians in Galatia. "In Christ, there is no Jew, Greek, male, female, slave, free." Can you comprehend how revolutionary, how radical, that sounded to a slave owning, proud, Jewish man? "All those barriers, all those divisions are over," Paul said. They are the old order - they are what sin does to the wholeness of God's creation - they are the wounds God wants to heal. In Christ you are all one.

It is better danced than trivialized by much talking. And there is hope, as well as judgment, warning, and challenge.

The hope is in God...God's kingdom...God's love incarnate in Jesus Christ...God's love incarnate in the lives of people. The hope is that there is more going for creation than us...and that in each generation men and women, full of God's own spirit of reconciliation, are called to do and say the things which make for peace. The kingdom will come, Woody Allen quipped, when the lion and lamb lie down together, and the lamb gets up.

Indeed - that's the eschatology - the vision - the poetry, that's the oil on the beard and the abundant dew of Mt. Hermon. But in Jesus Christ we are encouraged to see that coming kingdom in more modest images; in simple acts of reconciliation between people; in acts of leavening; in small, hidden healing activity in the life of the world. The hope is in Jesus, finally: in his kingdom breaking into our lives in ways we have to be silent to hear, and look very carefully to see. The hope is a Lord who calls us to confess our brokenness - in his own brokenness: and to celebrate the healing of his love at the table to which he invites us.

So let us come. How good and pleasant it is! Amen.